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**SURVEY DATE:** November 2017  
**SURVEY BY:** Context

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<td><strong>DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BUILDER:</strong></td>
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<td>Postwar Period (1945-1975)</td>
<td><strong>DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:</strong></td>
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**CONTEXT**
THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES

Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations. Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here.

POSTWAR THEMES

1 Shaping the urban landscape
1.8 Expressing an architectural style
1.9 Beyond the curtain wall
1.11 Overseas influences

5 Living in the city centre
5.1 Housing and lodging

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE

1890s Medical / residential
1920s Medical / residential
1960s Carpark/ residential

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: Refer to map

SUMMARY

Designed by émigré architect Kurt Popper, this modern residential apartment is an example of a building type that emerged in Melbourne in the late 1960s/early 1970s. It is distinctly modernist in form and aesthetic, with a curtain walled façade that features a rhythmic arrangement of brown brick spandrels and masonry balconies.
CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city’s transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Expressing an architectural style in the postwar period

Multi-storey commercial buildings made a significant contribution to postwar Melbourne, particularly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. With the resumption of building construction in the 1950s after the hiatus of World War II, the advent of curtain wall construction – enabling the application of a non-load bearing skin to the face of a building – radically altered the appearance of the modern city commercial building.

Constructed predominantly for the financial and business sectors, there was an eagerness amongst clients to establish a dominant city presence and to project a modern, progressive and prestigious approach to commercial building design. The resulting Post-War Modernist style of multi-storey buildings, influenced particularly by steel and glass office tower design in the United States, were in stark contrast to the pre-war city buildings in central Melbourne and presented architects of the day with a completely new design challenge.

Thirty major city buildings were completed in Melbourne in four years alone from 1955 to 1958 and 22 were office buildings within, or on the fringes of, the CBD (Saunders 1959:91). Largely influenced by the American skyscraper, the earliest office buildings of the 1950s utilised innovative curtain walling, formed from continuous metal-framing filled principally with glass. The curtain wall is described by Miles Lewis as ‘essentially a continuous, non-bearing skin on the face of a building’ and is one of the ‘leitmotifs of modernism, both in Australia and overseas’ (Lewis 2012:185). The curtain walled ‘glass box’ aesthetic was embraced by the local architects, and many buildings followed to the extent that high-rise office buildings with curtain walling became a defining characteristic of the new buildings in the latter half of the 1950s (NTAV 2014:5-6).

Amongst the first curtain walled buildings to be constructed in Melbourne was the 13-storey glass-fronted Gilbert Court at 100 Collins Street (J A La Gerche 1954-56), which was built to the height limit of 132 feet (40m), and – perhaps the most influential – the free-standing ICI House, 1 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1955-58). Located on the outskirts of the Hoddle Grid, ICI House was clad on all four facades with glass curtain walling and exceeded the well-established maximum building height within the Hoddle Grid. Large numbers of similarly designed city commercial buildings followed, often displaying bold horizontal contrast between alternating rows of glazing and coloured spandrels.
Beyond the curtain wall

The dominant glass box design of the late 1950s was challenged in the 1960s as the shortcomings of the fully glazed curtain wall became apparent – in particular its poor thermal performance – and new technologies became available. Advances in concrete technology, including the development of precast concrete, impacted greatly on both the appearance and structure of the commercial tower form from the 1960s onwards.

By the mid-1960s, architects were experimenting with a range of solid cladding materials for tower buildings including precast concrete, stone, reconstituted stone, tile and brick, as well as various metals for cladding, screening and detailing. A number of buildings continued to adopt true curtain wall construction; however, a different aesthetic was created by the use of solid external cladding in place of the typically glazed spandrels of the 1950s. This aesthetic is evident in a number of existing buildings in the city centre including the Guardian Building at 454-456 Collins Street (1960-61), with its stone-faced precast concrete panelled facades.

Concrete advances saw an increase in the use of reinforced column and slab construction in 1960s multi-storey building design, however concrete-encased steelwork also continued to be used. Some buildings incorporated structural elements in their main facades (for example load-bearing precast concrete panels or structural mullions) so were therefore not of true curtain wall construction. The structural nature of these facades was not necessarily apparent to the observer and the buildings continued to display the well-established repetitive characteristics of the true curtain wall façade, such as at Australia-Netherlands House, 468-478 Collins Street, designed by Peddle Thorp & Walker in association with Meldrum & Partners (c1968-70).

A broad range of design approaches became apparent in multi-storey commercial buildings of the 1960s and early 1970s. The horizontality of curtain walling was often balanced by the addition of vertical elements such as façade columns, strips or fins, which introduced textural patterns and visual strength to the facades of a number of buildings. Other multi-storey towers clearly expressed their structure externally with grid-like facades which clearly reflected the internal trabeated structural system. Sun screening provided additional patterning to facades, either as a repetitive decorative motif across the façade, as an expression of the window frames (such as at Royal Mail House, 253-267 Bourke Street designed by D Graeme Lumsden, 1961-63), in the form of balconies (as at the Melbourne Office of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney building, 251-257 Collins Street, 1971-73), or occasionally as an entire screen attached to the exterior face of the building.

Buildings also varied with towers set within plazas or on dominant podiums. The State Savings Bank of Victoria at 45-63 Swanston Street, designed by Buchan Laird & Buchan (c1974), is one example of a building constructed with a dominant podium. Buildings were sometimes set back from the street line behind public plazas – a strategy adopted to gain council approval for additional building height and evident in the Bates Smart McCutcheon designed Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building at 359-373 Collins Street (c1972-1975) – while others were built within larger plaza spaces, such as the AMP Tower & St James Building Complex (1965-69), designed by US-based firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM).
Overseas influences

America was the strongest overseas influence on the post-World War II architecture of Australian capitals. Australian architects often studied in American universities or visited the USA on study tours. American advances in the manufacturing of steel and concrete were also adopted in Australia. While steel was the main material in North American skyscrapers, concrete was used more often in Australia, and often combined with high-strength steel (Marsden 2000:70-72).

Another influence on architectural design was émigré architects who arrived in Melbourne before and after World War II. The impact of postwar immigration on Australian cities can be described in three ways: the enlivening of city centres by the arrival of European and Asian immigrants into mainly Australian-born communities; the rapid increase in the size of capital cities; and the roles played by particular immigrant groups, especially in the fields of architecture, economies, politics and cultural activities (Marsden 2000:95-99). Architect Kurt Popper, who arrived in Melbourne from Vienna in 1940, developers Bruno and Rino Grollo (sons of an Italian immigrant), and Viennese immigrant Ted Lustig and his Israeli son-in-law Max Moar, have had a significant impact on Melbourne’s city landscape through architecture and property development.

Émigré architects were often educated in progressive institutions where modernism was more advanced than in Australia. Their expertise and modernist designs gained recognition and were translated into the local context. Many were also involved with teaching at architectural schools and influenced the next generation of architects (Lozanovska & McKnight 2015:352-353). Examples in the city centre include the apartment buildings, Park Tower, 199-207 Spring Street (1969) and 13-15 Collins Street (1970), both designed by Kurt Popper.

Housing and lodging

The provision of accommodation has always been a major function of Australian city centres, and has included the establishment of hotels, hostels, boarding houses and serviced apartments, as well as terraces, flats and medium-density housing. Since the 1950s, the market sought by inner-city developers has moved to an almost exclusively middle- to higher-income group. New forms of accommodation from the 1950s replaced older buildings with high-cost, high-rise buildings for a restricted range of users (Marsden 2000:53).

The postwar era saw the introduction of apartments and flats in the well-established inner suburbs of South Yarra and St Kilda, spreading to Caulfield, Malvern, Camberwell, Hawthorn and Prahran. Victoria’s first block of ‘own-your-own’ or ‘OYO’ flats were built in Hawthorn in 1949 and the subsequent introduction of strata title legislation by architect and Lord Mayor Bernard Evans led to the proliferation of this housing type from the early 1950s (Heritage Alliance 2008:23).

The apartment boom reached the inner city in the late 1960s, facilitated by the Conveyancing (Strata Titles) Act of 1961. An Australian innovation, the legislation allowed each lot or apartment to have its own title deed (Stent 2018). Many émigré architects, who were experienced in higher density living in Europe, specialised in apartment design. Viennese-born architect Kurt Popper, for example, built two blocks of residential flats in central Melbourne – Park Tower, 199-207 Spring Street (1969) and 13-15 Collins Street (1970) (Heritage Alliance 2008:21).

Although marketed as a glamorous and convenient lifestyle, high-rise city apartment living was not popularly embraced. Exhibition Towers, an 11-storey residential building located at the north-west corner of Exhibition Street and Little Lonsdale Street, was designed and built as a residential and
commercial building. Constructed in 1968–69 to a design by Kenneth McDonald & Associates, the building was an endeavour to provide ‘OYO’ flats in the city centre. ‘High prices, high bills and Melbourne’s conservative living style’ contributed to difficulties in finding buyers for the units and the building was converted to the Courtesy Inn Motel in 1971 (Age 17 February 1971:3). It was also reported in 1971 that Park Tower was using its tenants’ car spaces as a public car park and the flats were being let on short-term leases. Similarly, the two-month-old 13-15 Collins Street apartments contemplated filling its lower four floors with shops, offices and medical practices (Age 17 February 1971:3, Figure 8).

In 1974, the MCC introduced a policy to encourage residents back to the city through the construction of a variety of residential typologies. However, because development was market driven, it was predominantly offices and retail spaces that were constructed in the city centre (Marsden 2000:54, 112).

SITE HISTORY

13-15 Collins Street forms part of Crown Allotment 12, Section 8, originally purchased by Godfrey Howett (CoMMaps). Until 1945, the land was occupied for more than 70 years by the family of Dr Walter Gray. Dr Gray’s house with doctors’ rooms was one of Melbourne’s oldest residential houses at that time (Argus 28 September 1945:6). By 1955, the land had been cleared by the then proprietor, the trustees of the Returned Servicemen’s League, and used as a car park (Argus 18 January 1955:15).

In 1968, plans for a new $2.25 million apartment building, ‘13-15 Collins Street’, were drawn up by a group of Melbourne business people who had formed a company called No 13-15 Collins Street Pty Ltd (Age 17 November 1972:3). The managing agents of the project were Jones, Lang & Wootton (Age 15 May 1968:40). By May 1968 the excavations for the foundations of the building were completed, and tenders were invited around the same time (Age 15 May 1968:40).

Architects Roy Grounds & Co Pty Ltd were initially appointed to design the building, the first modern apartment tower on Collins Street. The firm, however, did not complete the project. The building was constructed to an amended design by émigré architect Kurt Popper who had completed two of the first modern residential buildings in Melbourne by that time, Crossley House at 47 Little Bourke Street and Park Tower at 201 Spring Street. Although the façade of 13-15 Collins Street was largely redesigned by Popper, the finished building showed some degree of continuity with Ground’s design, including the use of masonry and render, and the dynamic arrangement of asymmetric massing across the height of the façade (Figure 2, Figure 1) (Age 19 June 1970:45).

One of the main differences between the designs of the two architects was the provision of the ground-level plaza. In Popper’s design, the first two storeys were on the street line while the upper-storey tower was set back from the street line, whereas, in Grounds’ design, the whole tower was set at the street line. The height of the building was also reduced from 24 to 22 storeys (Age 19 June 1970:45).
Completed in late 1970, 13-15 Collins Street was one of Melbourne’s most luxurious blocks of strata title (‘own-your-own’) residential apartments. The proposed selling prices for each of the 48 flats varied from around $35,000 for a single-bedroom apartment to $185,000 for the 3700-square-foot penthouse on the twenty-second floor (Age 19 June 1970:45).

Even the single bedroom apartments were planned as ‘luxury’ residences featuring two bathrooms, dressing and powder rooms, a large kitchen, and balconies with views over the ‘Paris end’ of the city (Age 19 June 1970:45; 2 June 1971:11). Underground car parking and resident caretakers were also included (Age 19 June 1970:45).

At their completion, the apartments at 13-15 Collins Street were advertised as attractive ‘city residences’ offering ‘a new exciting concept in modern living’ (Age 23 September 1970:5). Contrary to initial expectations, however, the units sold slowly, with apartments in the building from the third floor up remaining empty for almost two years between 1970 and 1972 (Age 17 November 1972:3).

Unsuccessful sales resulted in changes being made to the building and its operation. Two months after the building’s opening, the management of 13-15 Collins Street lodged an application to change the use of its lower-level suites from ‘residential’ to ‘professional’, in order to house medical practices (Age 19 June 1970:45).

In July 1971, the directors of 13-15 Collins Street sought Melbourne City council’s permission to change the use of floors eight to 23 to commercial. The request was refused by the Building and Town Planning Committee because 13-15 Collins Street was built under an arrangement of a ‘plot ratio bonus’, which allowed eight-foot ceiling heights for residential buildings, instead of the nine-foot minimum requirements for office buildings. Based on this regulation, council advised that management needed to purchase land of 2000 square feet for use as a public park in order for commercial zoning to be approved (Age 17 November 1972:3).
In 1972, Hanover Holdings Pty Ltd acquired 13-15 Collins Street and commercial zoning was extended to all of the residential flats in the building (Age 8 August 1973:19). The total cost for the adaptation of residential suites for the accommodation of consulting rooms was about $410,000, including the payment of a $300,000 fee to council. Consequently, the market value of the building increased to around $3 million in mid-1973 (Age 8 August 1973:19).

As a result of the rezoning, the units and penthouse at 13-15 Collins Street were granted two strata titles: residential and professional, which allowed conversion from a residence to an office (Age 9 May 1891:19; 19 August 1978:18). By 1974, businesses and doctors’ practices were established in the premises (Age 25 September 1974:8).

Today, 13-15 Collins Street continues to house retail spaces in the lower levels and apartment/office units above the plaza. Today, the building comprises 17 residential properties, 27 businesses, three shops and two food and drink outlets (CoMMaps).

Kurt Popper, architect

Kurt Popper (1910-2008) was born in 1910 in Vienna, where his father was a successful joinery factory owner. With a keen interest in theatre and stage design, Popper studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, an art and craft school established in 1867 (Edquist:9). Popper was also a visiting student at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he attended the classes of Clemens Holzmeister, one of Vienna’s leading architects (Edquist:11).

In March 1938, Popper was forced to leave Austria due to the political crisis in Europe. He first joined his friends in Paris. As soon as he could afford a ticket, he left for England, before travelling to Adelaide in April 1939, guaranteed by the Adelaide Jewish Community (Edquist:11).

In Adelaide, Popper briefly worked for Evans, Bruer & Hall, and completed a few commissions, one of which was featured in Australian Home Beautiful. While the war-time building restrictions were in action, he worked as an engineer (Edquist:11-12).

Popper held a position at the Housing Commission of Victoria in the office of Frank Heath in 1945-46. During this time, Popper’s first independent commission in Melbourne, the Sherman house (1946) in East Malvern, was featured on the cover of Australian Home Beautiful. Following the success of the Sherman house, Popper established his own practice in Jolimont (Edquist:12).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Popper worked for many Jewish clients in St Kilda, Caulfield, Toorak and South Yarra. By the 1960s, he was recognised as one of the most prolific residential architects (Edquist:12).

While his practice ranged from large single-storey houses to own-your-own flats, one of his early achievements was high-rise city apartment blocks. Popper designed three early apartment blocks in Melbourne, including the first postwar era apartment in Crossly Lane. In recognition of his expertise, Popper was invited by the School of Architecture at the University of Melbourne to lecture on the design, construction and viability of high-rise apartments (Edquist:19).

Popper retired in 1975, at the age of 65, after over 35 years in practice (Age 18 June 2014).
SITE DESCRIPTION

This multistorey residential building has a two-storey base/podium built to the street boundary with a twenty-storey tower set back from the street. The building is distinctively modern in its form and aesthetic and is a representative example of a new building type - the modern residential tower building that proliferated in Melbourne from the late 1960s.

The building is constructed with a concrete structural frame and a curtain wall facing Collins Street. The front façade is divided into a grid pattern determined by the intersection of vertical and horizontal bays, all clad in brown brick. Masonry balconies project forward on each floor at each edge of the building. At regular intervals, the balconies extend over two bays, creating a rhythmic pattern up the façade. The arrangement varies slightly at the top two levels (which are likely to correspond with penthouse apartments) where the masonry balcony spans the entire frontage.

The podium level is divided into two wings with a centrally positioned wide entry way to the apartment tower. Retail spaces are located on the ground level with commercial spaces on the first floor. While the form of the podium is intact, the finishes to the façade have been altered, including the removal of the original tiles. A curved canopy over the tower entry doors is the only remaining feature.

The side walls of the building are clad in brown brick, with the marking of the concrete floor plates evident. The side façade presents as a solid, monumental element of the building, in contrast to the more open and dynamic front façade.

INTEGRITY

The tower section retains a high level of integrity. The form of the lower level podium remains but alterations have occurred to the finishes, including removal of the original tiles to the façade.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

There are no residential towers from the postwar period in central Melbourne on the Heritage Overlay for the City of Melbourne. A group of four residential towers is included in this study. All are relatively intact examples of a new building type that emerged in the late postwar period (late 1960s – early 1970s).

Other Post-War Modernist residential buildings in the Hoddle Grid

There are a small number of buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne which were constructed in the same period and display similar characteristics to the apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street. These are detailed below.
Park Tower, 199-207 Spring Street (Kurt Popper, 1969) (Interim HO1263)

Exhibition Towers, 287-293 Exhibition Street (Kenneth McDonald & Associates, 1969-71)

Treasury Gate, 93-101 Spring Street (Moore & Hammond, 1971) (Interim HO1262)

Analysis

Both 199-207 Spring Street (1969) and 13-15 Collins Street (1970) were designed by émigré architect Kurt Popper, who was known for his apartment building designs.

Like the apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street, all three buildings are of modernist design, with structural concrete frames supporting curtain walls of repetitive glazed elements and masonry spandrels. In each case, primary aesthetic interest is derived from the expression of structure and materials (brick, concrete, glass) and the arrangement of structural elements (windows, balconies). There is a consistency to the arrangement of levels between all four buildings with retail/commercial spaces provided at podium level and multiple floors of apartments in a tower arrangement. Both 93-101 Spring Street and 199-207 Spring Street have a common space for apartment residents located at a mid-level.
# ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

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<td>Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).</td>
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<td>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).</td>
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<td>✓ CRITERION D</td>
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<td>✓ CRITERION E</td>
<td>Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).</td>
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<td>CRITERION F</td>
<td>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)</td>
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<td>✓ CRITERION H</td>
<td>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).</td>
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

**MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME**

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**OTHER**

N/A
REFERENCES

Contextual History references contained within City of Melbourne Hoddle Grid Heritage Review: Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975

Age, as cited.

Argus, as cited.


Context Pty Ltd 2012, Thematic History: A History of the City of Melbourne’s Urban Environment, prepared for the City of Melbourne.


Ramsay Consulting 2015, The Evolution of Planning Controls in Melbourne, for the City of Melbourne.

Sands & McDougall, Melbourne and Suburban Directories (S&Mc), as cited.


## PREVIOUS STUDIES

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Apartment Building  
PS ref no: HOXXXX

What is significant?

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street, Melbourne, built in 1970, and designed by émigré architect Kurt Popper.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The building’s original external form, materials and detailing; and
- The building’s high level of integrity to its original design.

Later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street, Melbourne is of local historic, representative, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street, constructed in 1970, is historically significant as one of the first wave of high-rise residential apartments constructed in the Melbourne CBD from the late 1960s, and before the introduction of a Victorian government policy in 1971 that directed where growth in Melbourne’s housing supply could take place. The deliberate promotion of 13-15 Collins Street as a venue for a glamorous modern lifestyle contributes to an understanding of Melbourne as a modern city in the postwar period. (Criterion A)

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street demonstrates a new building typology that emerged in the CBD in the late 1960s and early 1970s – the modern high-rise residential apartment building. The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street demonstrates key characteristics of its type. It was
constructed over a podium at the lower level accommodating retail and commercial spaces, with luxury residential apartments located in a recessed tower section. Residential accommodation included modern technologies such as individually controlled heating, cooling systems and security systems, access to communal recreation facilities located at the base of the apartments, basement car parking, and concierge/caretaker services. (Criterion D)

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street is of aesthetic significance for its distinctly modernist character expressed in its structure, facade articulation and skilful composition of form and materials. This is achieved by the combination of an expressed concrete grid structural frame, brick cladding and large areas of glazing. The façade is further enlivened by projecting masonry balconies that create a rhythmic pattern by regularly extending over two bays. The top levels of penthouse apartments are distinguished by larger balconies that unify the façade. (Criterion E)

The apartment building at 13-15 Collins Street is significant for its association with émigré architect Kurt Popper who brought European ideas about living in the city to the Melbourne CBD. Popper designed a number of residential apartment buildings in Melbourne including the six-storey ‘Crossley House’ (1967), which is known as the first modern residential block in Melbourne. (Criterion H)

**Primary source**

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)